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## PR's Outreach Project gives back to community

by Susan Barone, ASC Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, Ohio—A group of military members and civilian employees in the Air Force Research Laboratory's Propulsion Directorate have dedicated themselves for over two years to an outreach project that has improved morale within the organization.

The 14-member team came together in 1999 at the suggestion of Linda Hartsock, a management analyst in the business services branch. Before the holiday season, she asked the director if the directorate could lend support to the area communities. Later dubbed "Project Helping Hands," the now private charitable organization has drawn co-workers together from all over the directorate.

During the first year of the project, the team collected hats, scarves, mittens, pantry and food items. They assembled personal hygiene packages in gift bags for male and female recipients. The group donated the items to the battered women's shelter at the YMCA, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Gospel Mission and Daybreak, all of which are located in Dayton. They decided to focus the effort the second year by adopting families.

"Last year, we supported four families," said Hartsock. "One of our team members, Jane Cansler (also a management analyst in the business services branch), knew one of the nurses at Five Point Schools in Fairborn and called her to locate families who needed assistance," Hartsock said. "The nurse recommended three of the families. They were single mothers with two to four school-aged children."

Cansler made initial contact with the families to ask if they would accept the support. Each one responded positively, and the team took them under their wings.

A grandmother raising six grandchildren became the fourth family the team supported. One of her grandchildren was four years old at the time and he suffered from Leukemia, according to Hartsock. The only girl in the family also has medical problems.

During the holiday season, the group organized a "Helping Hands" tree and hung hand-shaped ornaments on it with information tags that included family member's name, age, grade level for children, size, color and a list of requested items.

"People within our directorate picked one or several tags, shopped for items and brought the gifts back to the office before a specified date," she said. "We had volunteers to wrap the gifts and arranged a time for delivery with each family."

One of the most memorable deliveries that team members made was to the grandmother's home.

"I had taken part in the Christmas delivery to the grandmother's home," said Lynne Nelson, a chemical engineer in the directorate. "When we started bringing in all of the presents, boxes of food and household items, (The grandmother) was absolutely overwhelmed. She stood there with tears of joy running down her face, as we continued to fill the living room and part of the kitchen.

"She was so appreciative. I was very thankful I was there to make that delivery. That moment made all of our efforts worthwhile, and it was a deeply moving experience that made my holiday last year very special," she said.

The grandmother sent a card to the directorate acknowledging them for their generosity.

"God has blessed each and every one of you in a very special way for all of the kind things that you have done for me and my family," she wrote. "I never knew people would be so kind and give so much to such a large family as mine. We truly thank all of you from the bottom of our hearts."

The group's latest project was supporting the families, as their children prepare to return to school. In anticipation of the cost of the project, the directorate held a fund-raising event July 4 where they raised approximately \$1,200, selling alien paraphernalia to include a chance to take a picture with an alien.

"We try to have a fundraising event once a month, except during the Combined Federal Campaign. We've set up a baked potato or a hotdog sale, for instance, at lunchtime," she said. "Our goal this summer

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was to raise enough to help us with back-to-school expenses and part of the money is needed for the holidays, so we can buy food and other items.

“I was raised to help your neighbors and your friends,” Hartsock said, “and I knew this directorate would be a good neighbor.”  
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